

UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen

A Primer

Synopsis

In December 2009, the 192 nations that have ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will meet in Copenhagen to come up with a global strategy to address climate change post 2012.

Background

The UNFCCC was adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It set an overall framework for international efforts to tackle climate change. The convention has been ratified by 192 countries.

The Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement linked to the UNFCCC. It sets legally binding targets for 37 industrialized countries and the European community for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It was negotiated in 1997 and entered into force in 2005. Canada's commitment is to cut emissions by 6 percent against 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. In 2007, Canada's emissions were 33.8 percent above its Kyoto target.

The negotiating process on climate change revolves around the sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC, which meets every year to review the implementation of the Convention. The goal of the 15th COP in Copenhagen is to adopt a new international climate agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol which expires in 2012.

The Bali Roadmap, agreed to at a UN climate change conference in 2007, states that the post-2012 agreement must encompass four pillars:

- Mitigation—reductions in greenhouse gas emissions
- Adaptation—the capacity to cope with unavoidable climate change
- Financing—funds for mitigation and adaptation efforts in developing countries
- Technology transfer—the transfer of clean technologies from industrialized countries to developing countries

Why This Matters

The post-2012 agreement has enormous implications for the efforts of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and its member agencies to end hunger.

Those who already struggle each day to get enough to eat will face additional hardships from climate change. There is widespread acceptance that the worst impacts of climate change will be felt in developing nations, in the form of increased droughts, greater flood damage, stronger storms, sea level rise, and spread of human and livestock diseases.

Some projections:

- 600 million more people could be at risk of hunger worldwide because of climate change by 2080 (UNDP Human Development Report, 2008).
- The decline in calorie availability could increase child malnutrition by 20 percent by 2050, relative to a world without climate change (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2009).
- Food production from rain-fed agriculture in Africa (the dominant method) could decrease by 50 percent by 2020 (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007)
- In 2008 alone, more than 20 million people were displaced by sudden climate-related disasters. An estimated 200 million people could be displaced as a result of climate impacts by 2050 (UNFCCC).

Smallholder farmers are among those who are most at risk of increased hunger from climate change. According to current estimates, more than 75 percent of the world's poorest people live in rural areas, and most of these are small-scale farmers.

Ways to Improve Food Security in a post-2012 Agreement

There are two main ways to protect and enhance food security in the new climate change agreement:

- Provide adequate financing for climate change adaptation in developing countries
- Include agriculture in the agreement, based on its ability to mitigate against climate change

Financing for Adaptation

There is general agreement by negotiating parties that any post-2012 agreement must include significant funds to help developing countries adapt to climate change. A recent global estimate, from the World Bank, suggests the costs of adaptation in developing countries will be US\$75-100 billion per year for the period 2010 to 2050. The Pembina Institute calculates Canada's share of the global effort at 3.4 percent (or US\$2.55-\$3.4 billion per year).

The Foodgrains Bank is calling on the Canadian government to support a substantial increase in funding by developed countries for developing countries. This funding should be additional to existing development assistance, so that other vital areas, such as health and education, aren't neglected. It should be given in the form of grants, not loans, to avoid the burden of debt repayment. It should fairly include developing country voices in decision making. And it should be focused on the livelihoods of vulnerable peoples, in particular smallholder farmers.

Inclusion of Agriculture

Agriculture contributes 14 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The agricultural sector—primarily through storing carbon in soils and reducing the use of energy intensive inputs (fertilizers, chemicals and fuel)—could contribute substantially to emission reductions.

The inclusion of agricultural land management in a Copenhagen agreement would ensure farmers could benefit from carbon markets (for example, a country or company that couldn't meet its emissions reduction targets could buy a carbon credit related to good soil management to help it achieve its requirements). The head of the World Bank has recently stated that agricultural carbon sequestration could generate annual revenues of close to \$1.5 billion for Africa.

While there is a good deal of optimism about the benefits of including agriculture in a climate change agreement, there is also concern regarding possible increased financial burdens on smallholder farmers, lack of access by the poor to carbon trading systems, and the risk that farmers will lose a degree of control over the management of their land. Any agreement on agriculture would need to be carefully designed to address these concerns, with increased funding for mitigation efforts.

The Foodgrains Bank recognizes that fairly integrating agriculture into a future Copenhagen agreement would have a number of benefits for smallholder farmers. Good sustainable land-use practices, such as conservation farming, not only cut emissions, but also improve productivity and resilience, and thus contribute to food security and adaptation.

Status of Negotiations

Climate change negotiators met in Bangkok, Thailand from September 28-October 10, and will meet in Barcelona, Spain from November 2-6, before heading to Copenhagen in December. At the start of the Bangkok meetings, the negotiating document was approximately 200 pages long, with some 5000 brackets (areas of disagreement). It needs to be whittled down to 30-40 pages. Progress has been slow.

There is growing concern that it is now too late for a comprehensive agreement at Copenhagen, but it is hoped that a suitable framework for moving forward will emerge. It is understood that a fair and equitable agreement for financing for developing countries is crucial to any wider agreement. There is also growing interest in including agriculture in the agreement, although it has been a late entry to negotiations. The Canadian government appears favourable to its inclusion, and recognizes the potential benefits of agriculture for mitigation, adaptation and improved food security.